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I am an unlikely advocate for our national parks and monuments. I spent the majority of my life in urban areas and am not from a family that hiked or camped or went to national parks. My mom actually jokes that she thinks Central Park has too many trees.

I married a woman who loves the outdoors, the mountains of Idaho and Wyoming are where she finds peace. For a decade she tried to get me to love camping and hiking to no avail. I hated tents and wasn't fond of trees and found hiking boring. But she persisted and in the summer of 2015 we spent a month living in a converted minivan in the parks and monuments of Southern Utah.

Our first day in Zion National Park did not begin auspiciously, the campgrounds were full and we ended up in a dusty RV park in Springdale. Dejected, we decided to go for a short walk in the park on the Emerald Pools Trail. Standing under the red rock canyon walls so deeply streaked with desert varnish was where I first understood that parks and wilderness could be for me too.

By the end of that trip we had hiked over 125 miles, and I had found my place of solace. We trekked to arches and through canyons, baked in the summer sun and scurried for cover when the monsoons rolled in. It was extraordinary. I was hooked.

One year later we left our home in San Francisco in a 23 foot Winnebago. We had no itinerary other than to spend a year living in the national parks and public lands of the western United States. Ten months into our journey I can say it was the best decision we ever made.

I love our public lands; they have brought a peace and stillness to my soul that I didn't know was possible. So far we have visited 43 national park and monuments and over a hundred other public land sites. We have hiked over 1000 miles. Along the way I have found many new places that I deeply love, like Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Glacier National Park and Death Valley National Park, but my place is still the southwest, especially Utah's red rock country.

Recently we spent a week in Bears Ears National Monument. We visited the area briefly in 2015 to see the iconic House on Fire Ruin, but we knew there was more. This time around, we did as many long hikes in the canyons as our legs permitted and left knowing we had still barely scratched the surface and would be back again and again.

As we drove back into cell range, a friend texted to let us know of President Trump's executive order to review national monuments going back to 1996. I was heartbroken, knowing what that means for places I dearly love, like Bears Ears and the Grand Staircase Escalante.

I know that there are millions of people out there just like me who don't think that wilderness is a place for them. They need a chance to be able to find what I did, but they can't have that chance if all our wild places are ceded to development. These days I often look at my friend's children and wonder whether they will get to experience the joy that I have found in our public lands or whether they will only get to see some of these remarkable places in pictures.

We have spent the year marveling at the courage and foresight of our leaders over the past century to set aside so many remarkable places for future generations. Today I write to encourage you to have the same courage and foresight. Though it may not be popular or easy in the short term to save our parks and monuments, a hundred years from now someone just like me will be tremendously grateful.